



**US Army Corps
of Engineers
Fort Worth District**

News Release

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Corps of Engineers announces National Safe Boating Week, beginning of summer recreation season

Officials of the Fort Worth District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are hoping the summer of 2000 will be a safe one for those who visit their favorite lakes this year.

National Safe Boating Week, May 21-27, will kick off an extended water safety campaign which will target the three peak summer holiday weekends: Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day.

"We want to encourage everyone to be familiar with the risks associated with operating a boat and to watch out for skiers, personal watercraft operators and others out enjoying our lakes," said Col. James S. Weller, Fort Worth District Engineer. "In the event of an emergency, wearing a life jacket can be the difference between life and death."

The Fort Worth District operates and maintains 25 lakes in Texas which draw an estimated 25 million visitors each year.

"With another hot Texas summer approaching, thousands of people will be coming to our lakes to cool off," Col. Weller said. "We want everyone to have fun and enjoy our lakes, but we want them to be extremely careful so they can come back next year."

In 1996, 38 drownings occurred at District lakes in Texas. In 1997, there were 24, 30 in 1998, and 30 in 1999. This year, with the recreation season hardly under way, the District has already had nine drownings.

The Corps has identified three basic approaches to reducing fatalities, injuries and property damages related to water recreation: design, enforcement and education. Of the three, education has been the most efficient in obtaining results.

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In 1971, before there were any water safety programs, 475 drownings occurred nationally at Corps lakes alone. Since then, even though visitation has doubled, the number of drownings has decreased. In 1986, after the Corps established a national campaign with a unified theme, "Your Safety--Our Concern," and commonly used audio-visual products, 230 drownings were reported. Drownings continued to decline to about 190 to 200 in the following years, and in 1994, the number decreased to 154 fatalities nationwide.

With the anticipated increase in usage of Corps water recreation facilities and the associated potential increase of water-related accidents and fatalities, continued emphasis on water and boating safety has become paramount. Corps of Engineers park rangers across the state regularly promote water safety to lake visitors as well as through programs presented to school children and special interest groups.

Statistics show that most drowning victims were not wearing personal flotation devices, which could have saved their lives. Most drowning victims never expected to be in the water and many drown within 10 to 30 feet of safety. Since drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death in the United States, every member of the family should learn how to swim. Even good swimmers should never swim alone and then only in designated areas.

"We've found that some of the most unsafe practices at our lakes include failure to wear life jackets, alcohol use, diving from banks into unfamiliar waters, temporary lapses in adult supervision of small children, skiing in congested areas, overexertion, swimming in undesignated areas and overcrowding of boats," Weller said.

Changing weather conditions bring additional hazards, he added, and he advises watercraft operators to go to shore at the first sign of lightning, heavy winds and rain.